



News Release

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Court approves plan for Lewis County to take over Vader water system

OLYMPIA — Lewis County will take over operation of Vader’s water system under terms of a court order issued October 29. The arrangement is a key step in solving a significant public health threat for 920 Vader area residents.

The south Lewis County community has experienced chronic water outages from broken pipes in its aging water system. The city doesn’t have the financial resources to rehabilitate the system.

The state departments of Health and Commerce have worked with the city and county during the past year to identify potential solutions. Ultimately, the city asked the Department of Health to petition Lewis County Superior Court to temporarily transfer ownership of its water system to Lewis County.

A technical team organized under the state’s Small Communities Initiative helped the city and county through the process. The Small Communities Initiative is a collaborative effort among the departments of Commerce, Health and Ecology. It helps small, rural communities struggling with economic viability, as well as complying with health and environmental regulations.

The team helped Lewis County get about \$1.3 million in grants and low-interest loans to pay for the repairs.

“At a time when public health must reinvent itself in the face of shrinking state budgets, this is a great example of what can be done with a creative team of willing partners,” said Secretary of Health Mary Selecky. “I commend Vader’s mayor and council for their courage in taking this step, and Lewis County for its willingness to step up to deliver a workable solution that protects the health of Vader residents.”

“We couldn’t stand by and watch one of our cities go under when we had the ability to obtain the financing they need,” Lewis County Commissioner Lee Grose said of the plan. He noted that the arrangement places no financial burden on Lewis County taxpayers.

Besides the frequent line breaks and outages – there have been 17 since 2007 – the city has been seeing money go down the drain, almost literally. The community loses about 40 percent of its treated water to leaking pipes.

“With the current economic downturn and with no capacity to grow, we felt this partnership with Lewis County and the Department of Health provided our citizens with the best option for moving forward,” Vader Mayor Ken Smith said of the agreement. “Once these repairs are complete, our community will be able to grow again.”

Since 1999, the Department of Commerce’s Small Communities Initiative staff has helped Washington communities secure more than \$75 million in state and federal funding. On average, the program helps bring at least two communities a year into regulatory compliance with the departments of Health or Ecology through improved water and/or wastewater systems.

“This program results in safer drinking water, environmental protection, and infrastructure that can serve community and economic development activities,” said John LaRocque, executive director of the Public Works Board at the Department of Commerce. “This is a shining example of how state government can help its communities solve problems and thrive.”

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